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The Impact of Self-Assessment: A Case Study on a Tertiary Level Efl Writing Class

Öz Değerlendirmenin Etkisi: Üniversite Seviyesindeki İngilizce Yazı Yazma Dersi Üzerine Bir Durum Çalışması

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Abstract

This article presents the findings of a seven-week case study which aimed to identify the benefits of self-assessment in EFL writing classes at tertiary level and to examine its effects on the development of metacognitive skills of the students. The study was conducted with 17 B1- English language proficiency level students studying at an English preparatory programme of a foundation university. First, the students were introduced to using rubrics to assess a written product. Then, each week after students composed a writing, a paragraph for the first three weeks and an essay for the remaining four weeks, the students were asked to assess their own writing by using the relevant rubric and filling in the self-assessment form. In addition, a questionnaire was conducted at the beginning of the study to investigate whether the students could identify their own strengths and weaknesses in writing, whether they could make sense of the criteria that are used for writing quizzes, and whether they made sense of the feedback given by the teachers for their writings. The same questionnaire was conducted again on the last day of the research to check whether the participants changed their opinions. The results revealed that self-assessment had a positive impact on the performance of the students' writings as well as on the development of their metacognitive skills as the students improved their understanding of the rubrics over time leading to more quality writings, they felt more responsible for their own learning, they were able to reflect on their own performance, and they became more autonomous learners.

Keywords: Self-assessment, assessment of writing, EFL writing, metacognition, student autonomy.

Öz

Bu makale üniversite İngilizce hazırlık seviyesinde yabancı dil olarak İngilizce yazı yazma derslerinde öz değerlendirmenin faydalarını ve öğrencilerin üstbilişsel becerilerine olan etkilerini saptamayı amaçlayan 7 haftalık bir durum çalışmasının bulgularını sunmaktadır. Çalışma, bir vakıf üniversitesinin İngilizce hazırlık bölümünde okuyan ve B1 seviyesinde olan 5'i kız 12'si erkek olmak üzere toplam 17 öğrenci ile gerçekleştirildi. İlk olarak öğrencilere yazılı bir metni değerlendirilmede kullanılan rubrikler tanıtıldı. Sonra öğren-

ciler her hafta yazı yazdıkça, ilk üç hafta haftalık bir paragraf ve sonraki dört hafta haftalık bir deneme, öğrencilerden kendi yazılarını uygun rubrikleri kullanarak değerlendirmeleri ve sonra öz değerlendirme formlarını doldurmaları istendi. Ayrıca, çalışmanın ilk haftası ve son haftasında öğrencilere toplamda iki kez aynı anket uygulandı. İlk anketin amacı öğrencilerin yazı yazma hususunda kendi güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini teşhis edip edemediklerini, yazı yazma kısa sınavlarında kullanılan değerlendirme ölçütlerini anlayıp anlayamadıkları ve de öğretmenleri tarafından verilen geribildirimleri anlayıp anlayamadıklarını incelemekti. Son gün yapılan anketin amacı ise öğrencilerin bu yedi haftalık çalışma sonucunda fikirlerini değiştirip değiştirmediğini görmekti. Çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre öz değerlendirme öğrencilerin yazı yazma performanslarına ve üstbilişsel becerilerine katkıda bulunmuştur. Öğrenciler, kullanılan rubrikleri zamanla daha iyi anladıkça daha kaliteli yazılar yazdılar. Her hafta yapılan öz değerlendirme çalışmaları sayesinde kendi öğrenimlerine karşı daha fazla sorumluluk duygusu geliştirdiler. Ayrıca kendi performanslarının hem güçlü yanlarını hem de zayıf yanlarını saptayabilip buna göre çözümler ürettiler. En nihayetinde kendi öğrenimlerinde daha çok özerk hale geldiler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öz değerlendirme, yazı yazma değerlendirmesi, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce yazı yazma, üstbiliş, öğrenci özerkliği.

1. Introduction

Assessment of writing, particularly EFL writing, has always been considered as unsettled and difficult for educators. Teachers need to be aware that there are a lot of factors affecting a student's writing in a foreign language. From the education he/she has received before to his/her native language, there are a lot of elements to be considered, which requires the teachers to be highly qualified.

For the past decade or so, the idea of assessment has dramatically changed. With a focus more on the learning process itself, assessment nowadays has been viewed as a way of contributing to learning. It is seen as a process and it takes place throughout the learning process. This type of assessment is referred as formative assessment. One of the most important aims of formative assessment is to help the teachers to monitor their students so that they can

provide feedback to their students and adjust their teaching continuously. Another aim is to help the students to check their own learning so that they become aware of their strengths and work on their weaknesses (Yorke, 2003).

From the perspective of formative assessment, it is important for the students to contribute to the assessment process so that they can follow their own progress and feel accountable for their own education. One of the methods of doing so is to integrate self-assessment into the writing classes. Literature offers a lot of research carried out on the application of self-assessment in a classroom which often yields positive results. It has suggested that self-assessment helps to increase the students' both motivation and level of understanding (Chen, 2005). However, it is not always easy to ask the students to assess themselves. The teachers need to train their students on assessment as well as giving feedback (Williams, 1992).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Assessment

Assessment is a core component in the language learning process as it creates many opportunities for both the teachers and the students. It is implemented to help students learn, become reflective learners and to yield formal proof of information (Boud, 1990). It makes it possible for the teachers to determine whether the goals and the objectives of a course are being met, and it helps the students to keep track of their own learning.

The idea of the students' contribution to the assessment process has been an issue discussed among educators for the past decade (Boud, 2000). Depending on the objectives of a course or the reason why the assessment takes place, assessment is no longer seen only as an examination done *to* the students when a course ends, but rather a process done *with* the students throughout the course.

2.2. Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is used in formative assessment procedures. It occurs when the students participate in evaluating what they have been learning, specifically their accomplishments (Boud & Falchikov, 1989). It helps the students improve their metacognitive skills, which helps them to develop aware-

ness about their own strengths and weaknesses so that they can come up with strategies to cope with the areas they feel incompetent.

Recently, there has been a great emphasis on using self-assessment at schools and universities. More and more educators around the globe recognise its advantages through which a considerable amount of responsibility for assessment shifts from the teacher to the students (Boud, 1995). In this regard, introducing self-assessment into a school programme has many benefits. To begin with, it potentially creates an atmosphere in which the students feel accountable both for their own learning. In addition, the students become aware of their learning and reflect on themselves. By doing so, they discover their strengths as well as weaknesses, which allows them to plan and come up with strategies to fix their weaknesses and improve their strengths even more. (Lee, 2006).

Although most educators recognize the benefits of self-assessment, it is generally difficult to introduce these techniques into schools and universities mainly because the possibility that the students may not be proficient and mature enough to handle assessment task. It is not easy to evaluate and make judgements about the quality of a product when you lack the necessary knowledge and expertise. It is highly possible that the learners may not have elaborative knowledge about the criteria in comparison with their teacher, which might affect the reliability of the students' assessment negatively (Boud, 1989). Considering such possible problems, proving the benefits of self-assessment both to the students and the administration could be quite difficult.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Question

Informed by the literature on self-assessment in EFL settings, this study addressed the following question:

- What are the benefits of self-assessment on the performance of university students' EFL writing?
- How does self-assessment contribute to the development of metacognitive skills of the university students?

3.2. The Research Design

This study took place in a classroom where an already planned writing syllabus needs to be followed. That is why, the researcher should be able to tailor his/her materials in conformance with what the students need in order not to hinder their normal learning process. All these vital necessities and requirements made the case study approach a very convenient and suitable choice for the research method for this study.

3.3. Participants and the Setting

Participants of this study were a class of 17 students, 12 males and 5 females, B1-level university students who were studying in the English Preparation Programme at a foundation university in İstanbul, Turkey. The students had a total of 20-hour of English courses a week, 6 of which were allocated for writing classes. For the first three weeks, the students wrote ungraded paragraphs each week. For the remaining 4 weeks, the students wrote ungraded essays each week.

3.4. Data Collection Tools

The first data collection tool was a questionnaire adapted from the study of Falchikov (1995). The questionnaire consists of 5 statements based on a 5 point-Likert-type rating scale ranging from 5 to 1 point (see Appendix A). The same questionnaire was conducted in the first and the last week of the study. The aims for the first week's questionnaire were to investigate whether the students could identify their own strengths and weaknesses in writing, whether they could make sense of the criteria that are used for portfolio (writing) quizzes, and whether they made sense of the feedback given by the teachers for their writings. The same questionnaire was conducted again on the last day of the research to check whether the participants changed their opinions.

The second data collection tool used in the study was a self-assessment form (see Appendix B). Each time the students finished writing a paragraph or an essay, they were given a checklist to go through their papers and edit their writings if necessary. After editing, they were asked to assess their own papers by using the relevant rubric and fill in the self-assessment form.

Self-assessment form consisted of 3 parts, each of which required the students to have a critical viewpoint and analyse their own writing referring to the relevant rubric. The questions were as follows:

- What are the main strengths of your paragraph/essay?
- What are its main weaknesses?
- How do you think you can improve your paragraph/essay?

3.5. Instructional Procedure

Data collection process lasted for 7 weeks. In Week 1, the teacher first conducted the questionnaire. Then he carried out a session and explained self-assessment. He went over the checklist and the rubric for paragraph. Then, using the rubric, he demo-assessed an anonymous paper produced by a student from another class. After that, he asked the students to practise assessing another anonymous paper using the same rubric. After the practice, the students wrote a paragraph. Once they finished writing, they went over the checklist to edit their paragraphs. After that, by using the rubric, they assessed their own paper and filled in the self-assessment form. In week 2 and 3, the students also wrote a paragraph, and the same assessment procedure was repeated.

From week 4 onwards, the students started writing an essay. That is why, at the beginning of week 4, the teacher first went over the checklist and the rubric for essay. Then, as previously, using the rubric, he demo-assessed an anonymous paper from another class. After that, he asked the students to practise assessing another anonymous paper using the same rubric. After the practice, the students wrote an essay. Once they finished writing, they went over the checklist to edit their essays. After that, by using the rubric, they assessed their own paper and filled in the self-assessment form. For week 5, 6 and 7 the same assessment procedure was repeated. At the end of the study, the teacher conducted the same questionnaire to see whether the students changed their opinions after involving self-assessment activities for 7 weeks.

3.6. Data Analysis

In order to analyse the questionnaire, the frequency of the answers to each statement in the first and the second questionnaire was compared using

IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 25). In addition, a paired sample T-test was carried out to see whether the results of the first and the second questionnaire were significantly different.

In order to analyse the self-assessment forms, the answers of the students in the forms were noted by the researcher. In addition to their writings, the students also received feedback on their self-assessment performance and expected to show an increase in the quality of reflection and the feedback they exhibited. When the research ended, all the data gathered were examined to check whether there was a progress in students' self-assessment performance.

4. Findings And Discussion

The first section presents the findings from the questionnaires that were carried out at the beginning and at the end of the study. The second section presents the findings obtained from the analysis of self-assessment forms that the students filled in after writing a paragraph or an essay each week.

4.1. Findings from the Questionnaires

In order to find out whether the students could identify their own strengths and weaknesses in writing, whether they understood the given criteria used for their writing quizzes, and whether they could make sense of the feedback they received from their teachers for their writings a questionnaire, consisted of 5 statements, was conducted at the beginning of the study. The same questionnaire was conducted again at the end of study to check whether the students changed their opinions.

Below are the descriptive statistics for each statement in the first and the second questionnaire.

Statement 1: I know how the content of my writing should be.

Statements	1st Questionnaire		2nd Questionnaire	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0

Undecided	16	94.1	2	11.8
Agree	1	5.9	12	70.6
Strongly Agree	0	0	3	17.6
Total	17	100	17	100

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Statement 1 in the 1st & 2nd Questionnaire.

In the first questionnaire, 16 students chose 'undecided', and 1 student chose 'agree' for the 1st statement. Relying on their past experience, the majority of the students might feel that they have some ideas regarding what a piece of writing should contain. However, they did not feel confident enough to state they agreed. On the other hand, at the end of the study, 2 students chose 'undecided', 12 students chose 'agree', and 3 students chose 'strongly agree'. This could indicate that after going through the 7-week self-assessment activities, the students had the opportunity to learn about the criteria used for the assessment of their writing quizzes. They started analysing a text not only by its mechanics but also by the ideas it delivered. Therefore, most students felt more confident in their knowledge about how to write a paragraph or an essay than before.

Statement 2: I know how to organise my ideas when I write.

Statements	**1st Questionnaire**		**2nd Questionnaire**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	3	17.6	0	0
Undecided	11	64.7	5	29.4
Agree	3	17.6	5	29.4
Strongly Agree	0	0	7	41.2
Total	17	100	17	100

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Statement 2 in the 1st & 2nd Questionnaire.

In the first questionnaire, 3 students chose 'disagree', 11 students chose 'undecided', and 3 students chose 'agree' for the 2nd statement. Although the students wrote many paragraphs in their previous level, it seems they still did not feel confident in their organisations. However, in the second questionnaire, 5 students chose 'undecided', 5 students chose 'agree', and 7 students chose 'strongly agree' for the 2nd statement. The reason for this change could be the impact of the self-assessment activities in which they used rubrics to assess various papers. By this way, they became highly familiar with the criteria, one of which was organisation.

Statement 3: I understand the given criteria for writing.

Statements	**1st Questionnaire**		**2nd Questionnaire**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	6	35.3	0	0
Disagree	10	58.8	0	0
Undecided	1	5.9	0	0
Agree	0	0	11	64.7
Strongly Agree	0	0	6	35.3
Total	17	100	17	100

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Statement 3 in the 1st & 2nd Questionnaire.

In the first questionnaire, 6 students chose 'strongly disagree', 10 students chose 'disagree', and 1 student chose 'undecided' for the 3rd statement. In their writing quizzes, the students were provided with the title of the criteria stating that they would get 5 points for Task Achievement, 5 points for Coherence & Cohesion, 5 points for Grammar, and finally 5 points for Vocabulary. However, they had never been provided with any sort of explanation as to what those titles actually refer to. Grammar and vocabulary are surely

almost self-explanatory, yet the students had no idea about Task Achievement and Coherence & Cohesion. Consequently, in the first questionnaire, a vast majority of the students reported they did not understand the given criteria. However, in the second questionnaire, conducted at the end of the study, 11 students chose 'agree', and 6 students chose 'strongly agree' for the 3rd statement. After being exposed to rubrics for 7 weeks, students showed a clear change, and all of them stated they understood the criteria. This could be a result of the training students had in the first week of the study, in which students were explicitly explained the details of the rubrics, and the ongoing feedback they received when they were carrying out self-assessment.

Statement 4: I know what the teachers expect in writing quizzes.

Statements	**1st Questionnaire**		**2nd Questionnaire**	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	1	5.9	0	0
Disagree	6	35.3	0	0
Undecided	8	47.1	1	5.9
Agree	2	11.8	9	52.9
Strongly Agree	0	0	7	41.2
Total	17	100	17	100

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Statement 4 in the 1st & 2nd Questionnaire.

In the first questionnaire, 1 students chose 'strongly disagree', 6 students chose 'disagree', 8 students chose 'undecided', and 2 students chose 'agree' for the 4th statement. This could be a direct effect of not being familiar with the criteria used in the quizzes as most students (16) stated they did not understand the given criteria in the first questionnaire. However, in the second questionnaire, 1 student chose 'undecided', 9 students chose 'agree', and 7 students chose 'strongly agree' for the 4th statement. After going through a 7-week self-assessment process, it is highly possible that the students developed an understanding of the criteria and learnt how to assess a paragraph and an

essay. Consequently, they stated that they knew what the teachers expected in the quizzes.

Statement 5: I understand the teacher feedback I receive for my writing.

Statements	1st Questionnaire		2nd Questionnaire	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5	29.4	0	0
Undecided	8	47.1	4	23.5
Agree	4	23.5	7	41.2
Strongly Agree	0	0	6	35.3
Total	17	100	17	100

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Statement 5 in the 1st & 2nd Questionnaire.

In the first questionnaire, 5 students chose 'disagree', 8 students chose 'undecided', and 4 students chose 'agree' for the 5th statement. This could be due to the content of the feedback the students received from their teachers. If the teachers used some terminology from the rubrics in their feedback, students might not make much sense of it because they had never even seen a rubric before. Consequently, it would not be possible for the students to utilise this feedback for their own writings. However, in the second questionnaire, 4 students chose 'undecided', 7 students chose 'agree', and 6 students chose 'strongly agree' for the 5th statement. At the end of the study, it is highly possible that the students were able to adapt to self-assessment activities, and they increased their understanding of the criteria. Consequently, they could gradually become better at understanding the feedback they received from their teachers.

4.1.1. Paired T-Test Results

In order to find out whether there is a significant difference between the 1^{st} and 2^{nd} questionnaire regarding the change in the students' answers, a paired-T test was conducted.

				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2 Tailed)
TotalPre - Post	-7.64706	2.14887	.52118	-8.75191	-6.54221	-14.673	16	.000

Table 6. Paired Samples Test for the 1^{st} and 2^{nd} Questionnaires.

When a paired t-test is conducted, if the significance value (p) is lower than 0,005 it is usually deemed significant. In this case, as shown in table 4.6. the significant value between the two questionnaires is 0,000 which indicates that the first and second questionnaire are significantly different from each other.

4.2. Self-Assessment Form

In the early stages of the study, many students tented to focus mostly on the mechanical aspect of their writings and tried to find grammar and vocabulary mistakes. They filled in the forms with the examples of wrong tense usage or misspelled words. For the question concerning their strengths, they wrote general statements such as "I think my vocabulary is good." Similarly, for the part in which they were asked to come up with some ideas to improve their writings, they offered too general solutions such as "I must study harder." or "I should be careful with my spelling." Although they were specifically told during the introduction of the rubrics that the quality and organisation of the ideas in a text were equally important as the mechanical aspects, the students failed to comment on such elements in their writings.

Being highly inexperienced in assessing themselves with a critical point of view, it could be argued that it was natural that the students did not per-

form well in the early stages of the study. In the first questionnaire, conducted before the explanation of rubrics in the first week of the study, students' answers revealed that they did not understand the given criteria, and they did not make much sense out of the feedback they receive from their teachers thereupon. After 3 weeks of the self-assessment activities, although there were a couple of students who showed progress in their assessment performance and rubric usage, most students still did not perform well. This could indicate that assessment is a complex procedure, and to be able to self-assess effectively, the students needed more time and practice.

Towards the end of the study, on the other hand, the students started to get used to the self-assessment process and showed a significant progress in their assessment performance. Instead of merely pinpointing their grammar and vocabulary mistakes, they referred to the criteria and commented on the organisation and integrity of their ideas. For example, for the parts where they needed to comment on their strengths and weaknesses, many students focused on how relevant and thus supportive their examples were. One student wrote: "The example I gave for my idea is very good. I think it supports my topic sentence." Another one wrote: "It isn't good I wrote this concluding sentence. It doesn't summarise my points well." In addition, for the part where the students were asked to come up with some ideas to improve their own writings, instead of broad and vague statements, many of them wrote specific solutions such as "I wrote a lot of ideas but didn't explained them enough. Instead of writing too many, I can support a few ideas and give good examples."

In conclusion, after the analysis of the self-assessment forms, the gradual increase in students' performance regarding the quality of their self-assessment can be seen clearly. Instead of too broad and unspecific as well as only grammar and vocabulary accuracy oriented comments, students were able to assess their writings from a different point of view. It could be argued that the cause of this change might be the amount of time they were involved in self-assessment activities and the increasing familiarity of the rubrics as well as the ongoing feedback the students received from their teachers on their self-assessment performance. As mentioned before, these results are in parallel with those from two questionnaires. Analysis of both questionnaires

showed that after a 7-week involvement in self-assessment activities, students understood the criteria better, and they were able to make sense of teacher feedback more.

5. Conclusion

At the end of the study, taking all the procedures including self-assessment as well as the questionnaires during the 7-week study, an overview of benefits of self-assessment for the students has been categorised.

5.1. Involvement and Responsibility

While carrying out self-assessment activities, the students had a central role in terms of assessment and providing feedback. In line with Boud's (1995) argument, the participation level was very high in the classroom. The teacher mostly acted as a feedback provider and allowed the students to go through the various steps on their own.

While writing their paragraphs and essays, the students were encouraged to use dictionaries as well as to help each other verbally. They were actively thinking whether their ideas were interesting, or their examples were relevant. Although one or two students did not seem to enjoy self-assessment in the first weeks, as the time progressed, all students adopted a serious attitude and tried to do their best.

During the assessment process when the students were filling in the self-assessment forms, they were thinking hard to come up with ideas to improve themselves. Although at first they did not really manage to refer to the rubrics, they got more and more familiar with the criteria each week, and they tried to offer quality suggestions, which resulted in more and more quality writings each week.

5.2. Thinking Critically and Being Reflective

In order to assess their own writing, the students were required to think critically and be reflective. Naturally, it was not easy for them to examine the writings from a different viewpoint in the early stages of the study. They mostly failed to comment on the strong and weak sides of the papers.

However, through practice and constant feedback from their teacher, in parallel with the results of previous studies (i.e. Longhurst & Norton, 1997) the students gradually increased their understanding of assessment, and towards the end of the study, they were able to complete the self-assessment forms with quality comments by referring to the rubrics. They came up with different ideas for themselves, and offered alternative and more relevant examples to be used next time. Similar to what McNamara and Deane (1995) suggested, the students became better at examining their weaker and stronger sides.

5.3. Autonomy

One of the aims of self-assessment is to increase the autonomy of the students (Blanche & Merino 1989). During the study, students went through many stages including being able to understand and utilise the rubrics to assess their writings themselves. They detected their strong and weak sides and came up with possible solutions to work on their mistakes and strengthen their strong sides even more. Being able to assess their own learning allowed the students to position themselves in the learning process so that they can determine what to do to achieve their goals. They were able to analyse their own educational needs and produced study techniques that suited them best. As the students got familiar with the rubrics, they made more sense of the feedback they received from their teachers, and used it in their advantage while revising their writings. Overall, all the self-assessment procedures helped the students to recognise their strengths and weaknesses and took the control of their learning, which greatly contributed to the development of their metacognitive skills.

6. Implications

The findings of the study suggest there are quite a few benefits of using self-assessment in EFL writing classes for the students. To begin with, self-assessment activities allow the students to be in the centre of the assessment process, which creates a feeling of responsibility (Keaten & Richardson, 1993). When the students consider themselves accountable for their own education, they tend to participate in the lessons more in order to understand the subject better, which is surely what all teachers wish for their students. In addition, supporting what Lee (2006) suggests, the present study revealed that the stu-

dents become more autonomous in terms of being able to deal with their own weaknesses and finding possible solutions to improve their writings. Therefore, if such activities are utilised in a writing class, students can develop a sense of autonomy; thus, may not merely depend on their teachers to detect their weak sides and provide feedback

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Name & Surname: Date:

For each of the questions below, please circle the response that best characterises how you feel about the statement, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

		Strongly Disagree **1**	**Disagree** **2**	**Undecided** **3**	**Agree** **4**	**Strongly Agree** **5**
1	I know how the content of my writing should be.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I know how to organise my ideas when I write.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I understand the given criteria for writing.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I know what the teachers expect in writing quizzes.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I understand the teacher feedback I receive for my writing.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B: Self-Assessment Form

Week Number: _____ Date: _________________

Assessor's Name & Surname: ____________________

Please answer the following questions.

1.What are the main STRENGHTS of your paragraph/essay?

2.What are its main WEAKNESSES?

3.How do you think you can improve your paragraph?